

VZCZCXRO4994
RR RUEHAG RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHRA #0037/01 0221121
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 221121Z JAN 10
FM AMEMBASSY RIGA
TO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6247
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIGA 000037

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EU](#) [LG](#)

SUBJECT: LATVIA LOOKS TO U.S. TO STRENGTHEN EU

Classified By: Bruce D. Rogers, Deputy Chief of Mission, for reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Although supportive of the new European institutions, the Latvian perception is that Van Rompuy and Ashton are weak, undermining the ability of the EU's to speak with one voice and reinforcing the power of the larger Western European members. To counter this perceived weakness, Latvian officials would like the U.S. to engage early and often with Van Rompuy and Ashton as a means of bolstering their credibility and the future authority of their positions. End Summary.

Reinforcing the Power of Big Countries

12. (C) Despite the hope that the Lisbon Treaty would strengthen the influence of small member states, Latvians believe that the selection of Van Rompuy and Ashton was a clear indication that France, Germany and the United Kingdom would seek to keep these new institutions weak. Right-of-Center MEP Inese Vaidere told us that the lack of transparency in the selection process showed how Sarkozy and Merkel, in particular, sought to remove any potential challenge to their power within the EU. Vaidere said pointedly that "We need leaders, not technocrats." Although neither the MFA nor the PM's office would offer such a blatant critique both offices noted that a more powerful choice might have enhanced the ability of the EU to act with one voice, particularly on issues of foreign policy. The Head of the MFA's European Department, Indulis Abulis, told us that U.S. engagement would help establish the credibility and authority of these new positions and offered the that U.S. will engage immediately with the new leadership. He concluded that, for now, Lisbon's changes require real commitment if they are to become functionally important.

Spanish Presidency

13. (C) Abulis praised Spain's emphasis on energy security, transatlantic relations and EU enlargement. The PM's Foreign Policy Advisor, Solveig Silkalna, noted that the Spanish rotating Presidency would logically shift some of the EU's focus from Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean, but that the overarching goal of promoting EU enlargement was consistent with Latvia's interest. Latvian FM Riekstins' announcement of support for Turkey's EU integration on January 6 was consistent with this view. Silkalna also emphasized the importance of Spain's attention to the transatlantic relationship. MEP Vaidere wasn't as kind, claiming that the potential lack of interest in Eastern Europe is especially dangerous given what she described as Russia's ambition to re-exert its sphere of influence in Eastern Partnership countries. All interlocutors describe the difficult logistical challenges faced by Spain in leading the transitional presidency and expressed satisfaction that Spain, at least has the administrative capacity to deal with these issues.

European External Action Service

14. (C) Latvia's most concrete Lisbon Treaty objective is to ensure a strong EEAS. Latvia wants at least one third of the EEAS' staff to be comprised of member states' diplomatic services and is pushing hard for the EEAS to provide consular services as part of its core function. This would expand Latvia's ability to provide consular services in a broader

range of countries given its limited diplomatic presence abroad and lack of funding for new missions.

Latvian Engagement with the EU

15. (C) Abulis pointed out that Latvia's principal forum for developing its EU positions comes at the Nordic-Baltic six, or NB6, meetings. He said the Latvian chairmanship of the Baltic Council in 2010 would also be a venue for the development of regional positions on EU matters. Still, neither the PM's office nor the MFA could describe any prime objectives or strategic thinking about how it might engage with the EU and help shape its new institutions. Silkalna said that Latvia's EC commissioner, Andris Pielbags, is in a good position to influence the EEAS' development as the commissioner for development, but wasn't clear on how he would use this position or what his specific goals are.

Hope Springs Eternal

16. (C) While Latvia's European Parliament delegation is small (8 members, going up to 9 under Lisbon), Abulis noted the improved professionalism and effectiveness of Latvia's current MEPs. He said this is a possible area of strength and noted that former PM Godmanis is now on the budget committee. Vaidere said Latvia's MEP's are active and cooperating on issues of importance to Latvia, including agricultural policy, budget policy and the Eastern Partnership. (Vaidere is one of the European Parliament's Ukrainian election observers.)

17. (C) Comment: Latvian officials hope that the new institutions created by the Lisbon Treaty will bolster the authority of small states on the broader EU agenda. Nevertheless, Latvia still has not developed a

RIGA 00000037 002 OF 002

strategic vision for how it wants to approach the EU. The fact that Latvian officials and politicians are looking to the U.S. to boost the authority of Europe's new leaders shows just how much Latvia relies on the U.S. for leadership on foreign policy issues.

GARBER